

Austin Osman Spare and the Zos Kia Cultus

H.P. Lovecraft, in one of his tales of terror, alludes to certain entities which have their being “not in the spaces known to us, *but between them*. They walk calm and primal, of no dimensions, and to us unseen.”

This aptly describes Austin Osman Spare. The circumstances of his birth emphasize the element of ambivalence and *inbetweenness* which forms the theme of his magic. He told me he was not sure whether he was born on the last day of December 1886: or on New Year’s Day, 1887; whether, as he put it, he was Janus backward-turning, or Janus forward-facing. But whichever aspect of the deity he more closely represented, it is a fact that his life was a curious blend of past and future. Despite his inability to remember quite when he was born, the place was certainly Snowhill, London: he was the son of a City of London policeman.

When barely twenty years of age he began writing *The Book of Pleasure*, in which he used art and sex to explore the subconscious mind. *The Book of Pleasure* reeks of diabolism to such an extent that Mario Praz in *The Romantic Agony* (Oxford, 1933) refers to Spare as an English “satanic occultist”, and he places him in the same category as Aleister Crowley.

Spare’s intense interest in the more obscure aspects of sorcery sprang from his early friendship with an old colonial woman who claimed descent from a line of Salem witches that Cotton Mather

had failed to exterminate. Spare always alluded to her as Mrs. Paterson, and called her his “second mother”. She had an extremely limited vocabulary composed mainly of the fortune teller’s argot, yet she was able to define and explain the most abstract ideas much more clearly than could Spare with his large and unusual vocabulary.

Although penniless, she would accept no payment for her fortune-telling, but insisted on the odd symbolic coin traditionally exacted as a *sacrifice fee*. Apart from her skill in divining, she was the only person Spare ever met who could materialize thoughts to visible appearance. Aleister Crowley – who met and attracted all kinds of psychically active individuals – met two only in the course of his life who had this particular *siddhi*.¹

Mrs. Paterson, when visited for purposes of fortune-telling, would read a person’s character immediately as a matter of course before going into details about the future. If she prophesied an event she was unable to describe verbally, she would objectivize the event in a visual image and the querent would see, in some dark corner of her room, a clearly defined if fleeting image of the prophesied event. And this never failed to follow at the appointed time.

It was undoubtedly Mrs. Paterson’s influence that stimulated Spare’s innate interest in the occult, which, allied to his remarkable skill as a draughtsman, enabled him to reproduce through his art the strange entities he encountered in transmundane spheres. He drew several portraits of Mrs. Paterson, one of which appeared in *The Focus of Life*, published by the Morland Press in 1921. Another drawing of her by Spare appeared in 1971 in the part-work encyclopaedia *Man, Myth and Magic*, where she is shown after having ‘exteriorized’ herself in the form of a nubile girl.

Spare too was able occasionally to conjure thought-forms to visible appearance, but whereas in the old witch’s case it was an

¹ Allan Bennett was one; the other, Crowley did not name.

unfailing power, in his own case it was erratic and uncertain. On one occasion it worked only too effectively, as two unfortunate persons learnt to their cost. They were of the dilettante kind, mere dabblers in the occult. They wanted Spare to conjure an Elemental to visible appearance. They had seen materialized spirits of the dead in the séance room, but had never seen an Elemental. Spare tried to dissuade them, explaining that such creatures were subconscious *automata* inhabiting the human *psyche* at levels normally inaccessible to the conscious mind. As they almost always embodied atavistic urges and propensities, it was an act of folly to evoke them as their intrusion into waking life could be extremely dangerous. But the smatterers did not take him seriously.

Using his own method of elemental evocation, Spare set to work. Nothing happened for some time; then a greenish vapour, resembling fluid seaweed, gradually invaded the room. Tenuous fingers of mist began to congeal into a definite, organized shape. It entered into their midst, gaining more solidity with each successive moment. The atmosphere grew miasmic with its presence and an overpowering stench accompanied it; and in the massive cloud of horror that enveloped them, two pinpoints of fire glowed like eyes, blinking in an idiot face which suddenly seemed to fill all space. As it grew in size the couple panicked and implored Spare to drive the thing away. He banished it accordingly. It seemed to crinkle and diminish, then it fell apart like a blanket swiftly disintegrating. But while it had cohered and hung in the room like a cloud, it was virtually opaque and tangible; and it reeked of evil. Both the people concerned were fundamentally changed. Within weeks, one died of no apparent cause; the other had to be committed to an insane asylum.

Although Spare was convinced that an occult Intelligence frequently painted, drew, or wrote through him, he was unable to discover its identity. He was, however, in almost daily contact with a familiar, a spirit-guide known as Black Eagle whom he had clearly seen and drawn on several occasions. But he was

convinced that Black Eagle was not the sole source of his automatism. Spare had but to turn his head suddenly and he would sometimes catch a glimpse of the familiar spirits that constantly surrounded him. Several times he had 'caught' one of them long enough to make a lightning-swift sketch.

Spare's frequent traffic with denizens of invisible realms led to his evolving a graphic means of conjoining all thoughts – past, present, and future – in the ever-fluid ether of Consciousness. His graphic symbology represents a definite language designed to facilitate communication with the psychic and subliminal world.

It was Spare's opinion that for this language to be truly effective, each individual should evolve his own, creating his sigils from the material nearest to hand – his own subconscious. He gave as a reason for so much failure in divination the fact that, although the operator sometimes succeeded in annexing traditional symbols to his own subconscious awareness of their true values, many of the symbols eluded correct interpretation; they therefore failed of nexus and were consequently sterile.

Not only could Spare 'tell fortunes' in the usually accepted sense; he could also use the cards for influencing the host of subtle entities which swarm in the astral light, and with their co-operation he accomplished much of his magic.

He designed and used a pack of cards which he called the 'Arena of Anon', each card bearing a magical emblem which was a variation of one of the letters of the Alphabet of Desire.² When vividly visualized, the emblem or sigil mysteriously stirs the subconscious and a corresponding image, or set of images, arises in the mind. In proportion to the power of belief in the sigil, so is the clarity of the image which it evokes. If the sigil taps a layer of ancient or cosmic memory, some astonishing images surge into

² The basis of this Alphabet, together with many early examples of the letters composing it, is given in Spare's *The Book of Pleasure*, on which he began work in 1909 and published (privately) on completion, in 1913.

the mind and the skilful sorcerer is able to project them into the astral mind-stuff of other individuals, so that they imagine the image to be a palpable presence.

Spare could influence elemental phenomena as well as the minds of other people. Great danger lies in possession, and Spare wisely refrained from writing too openly about the processes he employed. What I know about his methods I learnt from personal contact with him.

Even as a child, Spare employed these curious sigils. One is reminded of Yeats's words in *The Trembling of the Veil*: "Mathers described how as a boy he had drawn over and over again some event that he longed for; and called those drawings an instinctive magic."

When he was seventeen Spare stayed at the home of the Rev. Robert Hugh Benson, author of *The Necromancers* and other occult novels. They went out for a walk one summer day; a serene and cloudless blue sky shone overhead. It had been fine all day, and Benson was curious to know whether Spare could, in such unlikely circumstances, produce rain by magical means. Spare said he could, proceeded to trace a sigil on the back of a used envelope, and, pausing in his tracks, concentrated all his attention upon it. Within ten minutes small clouds began to appear; they massed at a point immediately above their heads and discharged violently. Both Benson and Spare were drenched to the skin.

A year or two later, Benson introduced Spare to the Hon. Everard Feilding, Secretary of the Society of Psychic Research. At the time, Feilding was associated with Frederick Bligh Bond, the President of the Archaeological Society who, by psychic means, had discovered the buried Edgar Chapel at Glastonbury Abbey. Like Benson, Feilding wanted proof of Spare's magical powers and, when the latter offered to oblige, proposed the following test: Spare was to materialize an object which Feilding mentally visualized without giving any clue as to its nature.

Spare drew one of his magical sigils, which, instead of being symbolic of the unknown desired object, was the ideograph of a familiar spirit whose services he frequently employed when any mind-reading was required.

After some time, Spare received a vivid impression of the object in Feilding's mind. He then drew a second sigil, told Feilding he need no longer concentrate, and proceeded to do so himself. These proceedings were interrupted by a knock on the door. Feilding tiptoed to the door, opened it, and was amazed to find his valet proffering a pair of slippers. Feilding turned to Spare and asked him how he had done it!

An essential part of Spare's technique lay in deliberate forgetfulness, and this is the part which a novice finds extremely difficult. One is reminded of the king who lavished a fortune on an itinerant alchemist who had successfully manufactured the Philosopher's Stone. After giving the king lengthy and complicated instructions, which the king repeated by heart, the alchemist smiled and said approvingly: "Yes, your Highness has remembered every detail perfectly; there is just one further point to remember. For three minutes before the Alchemical Substance congeals, you must concentrate your mind upon its lustre as it seethes in the alembic, but during this time you should on no account let the thought of *greenness* cross your mind for even a moment." The king thanked the alchemist and prepared to make the Stone. Everything went according to plan until the last few minutes, when the mind of the king was invaded by an army of green objects which he was powerless to banish.

With Spare's sigils the case is somewhat similar. The reason he gives for forgetting the desire at the time of invoking it lies in the fact that, for the operation to succeed, the conscious mind must have no inkling of the transaction. Consciously formulated desires take time to materialize; subconscious desires can be made to materialize very swiftly. Consciousness of the desire vitiates the entire process, so a method had to be found of

forgetting the desire during the period of magical evocation. Spare called the process “union through absent-mindedness” and advocated the yogic method of emptying the mind of all but the sigil. This is not always successful, so as an alternative he suggests the sigillization of perennial desires, desires that are sure to arise periodically, as for instance the desire for beautiful women. Several such desires are then sigillized, scrambled together, and laid aside for several days. On reassembling the cards upon which they have been drawn, the operator is unable to remember precisely what sigillizes what! The rite is then comparatively easy to accomplish for it requires only concentrated thought.

Spare often supplemented the process by a sexual formula which endowed it with added efficacy. He derived most of his sex-magical formulae from a Delphic Pythoness who communed with him during sessions of automatic writing. This Delphic Oracle was probably the spirit of old Mrs. Paterson, guiding him from beyond.

One such formula enabled him to “give life to the autistic, by an earthenware virgin”. In view of the present-day predilection for auto-erotic aids to ecstasy, the resuscitation of the dildo³ and the widespread curiosity about the sorcery of sex, Spare’s formula of the Earthenware Virgin is of particular interest, though for Spare it had an exclusively magical aim.

Until he received this formula he had, as he put it, “copulated merely with the atmosphere, or rode whores, witches and bitches of all kinds, there being few virgins”.

In order to translate a specified desire from the level of subjective consciousness to the material or objective plane, the Pythoness instructed him to construct an urn in conformity with

³ At the time of writing, my attention has been drawn to “the first European sex paper” which reflects the current obsession with purely mechanistic aspects of self-love. Nevertheless, such methods employed in a magical manner may place the practitioner in direct contact with his daemon or genius.

the dimensions of the erect penis. Sufficient space – but no more – was to be left at the end of the vessel in order to form a vacuum when the phallus was inserted. The cavity was to contain the sigillized wish, which was automatically consecrated at the moment of orgasm. The greatly enhanced pleasure induced by the suctional power of the vacuum increased the size of the penis and caused an unusually prolonged orgasm. At the critical moment, the desire was to be vividly visualized and held steadily in mind for as long as possible. When the mental image began to wane and disappear the urn was hermetically sealed and buried in a casket filled with earth, or in the ground itself.

Spare maintained that this was the formula used by the ancient Greek *urnings*; hence the designation. In one of his writings he gives the following instructions: “Bury the urn at midnight, the moon being quartered. When the moon wanes, disinter the urn and – while repeating a suitable incantation – pour its contents as a libation on to the earth. Then re-bury it.”

As the sperm would by that time have congealed, Spare advised a replenishment before the second ‘burial’. He describes the Earthenware Virgin as

the most formidable formula known; it never fails and is dangerous. Hence, what is not written down must be guessed.

From this formula was derived the legend of the genii of the brazen vessel associated with Solomon.

Whether this is so, I do not know, but there is a curious illustration in Payne Knight’s celebrated *Discourse on the Worship of Priapus* (London, 1865) which is not satisfactorily explained in the text. It is in two parts and depicts a male figure with sexual organ erect; in his raised right hand he holds a vase-shaped sheath which he is about to clamp upon the phallus. The second part of the illustration shows the same image, but with penis drooping languidly after ejaculation, and the waist of

the figure girdled with fruits symbolic of the rite's fulfilment. There are also one or two illustrations in Reinach's *Répertoire des Vases Peints* (Paris, 1899), which suggest a similar magical practice.

Spare could undoubtedly materialize atavisms from his own subconsciousness and clothe them fleetingly in the sexual ectoplasm (or astral semen) of his atmospheric copulations.⁴

Occasionally, these entities actually achieved a degree of density sufficient to make them visible – and even palpable – to other people. He called them “elemental automata” or “intrusive familiars”. They frequently copulated amongst themselves, engendering offspring simultaneously. Spare has depicted many of these creatures engaged in their peculiar pursuits and has written several accounts of the Sabbath which he attended in their company. Old Mrs. Paterson's influence is here very marked, for he used her likeness as *the type* of the ancient witch in many of his drawings.

One of Spare's constantly recurring themes concerns the transmogrification of age into youth. The first time Mrs. Paterson transformed herself before his eyes, the sorcery of it left a permanent impression which inspired many of his later works. One moment she was the lined and wizened old crone; then, in a flash, she appeared to him as a syren equipped with all the allurements of sex-appeal, an image that fulfilled his penchant for full voluptuous contours.⁵ How she projected such a glamour he was unable to discover, and although he never surprised her secret, he tried – with partial success – to emulate her example. This he did by a magical induction of ecstasy which enabled him to function at levels of high emotionalism. He was at such times creatively active for days on end, needing neither food nor sleep. Enhanced sexual activity accompanied this

⁴ See *The Hieratic Papyrus of Nesi-Amsu*, translated by E. A. Wallis Budge, London 1891, for an account of ancient ritual masturbation.

⁵ See p.189, *supra*.

condition. On the few occasions when he did not sublimate this energy and direct it to artistic creation, he regretted it. Such was his hunger that in one night alone he coupled with eighteen women. He called these outbursts “Dionysiac spasms of pan-sexualism”, in which he had a vision of “all things fornicating all the time”.

Spare wrote down his witch-guide’s instructions and, over the years, worked them into several books which he illustrated with some of the best of his drawings. It was only towards the end of his life, however, that he concentrated the mass of Mrs. Paterson’s teachings into definite form. This consisted of a series of aphorisms and a magical grimoire which he was working on at the time of his death in 1956. Both these works survive in manuscript. He intended calling the Grimoire *The Book of the Living Word of Zos*, the name *Zos* being his magical name in the Witch-Cult.⁶

The Grimoire is not so much a résumé of the Witch Tradition as a highly individualized system of sorcery reflecting his creative genius and aesthetic theories. He also developed and extended his magical alphabet, the Atavistic Alphabet about which he had first written in *The Book of Pleasure* in 1913. Each letter represents a sex-principle potent to awaken remote atavistic strata of the *psyche*. Examples of its use are given in the Grimoire, where he allies it with Witchcraft. The following is a literal translation of one of his favourite spells:

*O mighty Rehctaw!
Thou who exists in all erogenousness,
We evoke Thee!*

*By the power of the meanings arising from these
forms I make.
We evoke Thee!*

⁶ Since published in *Zos Speaks! Encounters with Austin Osman Spare*, Kenneth & Steffi Grant, Fulgur Limited, 1998.

*By the Talismans that speak the secret leitmotif
of desire,
We evoke Thee!*

*By the sacrifices, abstinences and
transvaluations we make,
We evoke Thee!*

*By the sacred inbetweenness concepts
Give us the flesh!*

*By the quadriga sexualis
Give us unvarying desire!*

*By the conquest of fatigue
Give us eternal resurgence!*

*By the most sacred Word-graph of Heaven
We invoke Thee!*

This prayer or evocation embodies traditional Sabbatic concepts and might be described as the Alpha and Omega of Spare's doctrine.

Rehctaw (Watcher) is spelt backwards, not for the reason given in connection with Dee and Kelley's angelic communications but because the 'backward' symbolism conceals the key to the reification of desire, the final absorption of the ego-current in its source – the Self. Hence Spare's emphasis on Self-Love, or autotelic ecstasy. *Rehctaw* is the symbol of reaching backwards in time to infinite remoteness by the mechanism of intense nostalgia. Whether it is symbolized by the Moon presiding over the nocturnal orgies of the Sabbath, or by the back-to-back dance of the witches and warlocks (see de L'Ancre), or by the infamous kiss of the Sabbath which is applied to the anus of the Demon; all such symbols indicate an infinite regression which causes atavistic resurgence and the inversion of sex to Self-Love.

"Shall I speak of that unique intensity without form? Know ye the ecstasy within? The pleasure between ego and self? At that

time of ecstasy there is no thought of others; there is *no thought*.⁷

The opening line of the evocation resumes the method employed at the Sabbath for conscious wish-fulfilment through self-pleasure, and it is glossed by the words: "Except in the sensuous impact of flesh on flesh there are no meanings." The Self lives in, permeates, and is identical with, Reality – the enduring and ever present Consciousness – the living flesh compact of endlessly reifying dream.

The second part of the evocation refers to the sigils and letters of the sacred alphabet wherewith *Zos* (i.e. the body considered as a whole) produces its subtle spells by projecting its Self on to the mists of matter, without. In other words, the language of desire and its meanings penetrate the silent regions of consciously forgotten experiences, evoking by its reverberant power the ineluctable memories that abide perpetually in subconsciousness.

"The Talismans that speak the secret leitmotif of desire" are, primarily, the two major magical instruments of Spare's system – the Hand and the Eye, of which the phallus and the kteis are the secret symbols. They are both used, as in Crowley's Cult, for evoking or provoking "consciousness in touch; ecstasy in vision".

The fourth clause of the Sabbatic Prayer refers to the occult maxim that great achievements proceed upon total exhaustion of energy in one great burst of release, after a period – long or short – of sacrifice or abstention, during which time the necessary energy is accumulated and intensified.

The Sabbath is always secret, communal and periodic; an enforced consummation for almost unlimited wish-fulfilment.

Prolonged voluntary abstinence, repression and sacrifice, is released in mass sexual congress and sublimated to one end: the

⁷ *Anathema of Zos*, by A. O. Spare; London, 1927.

exteriorization of a wish, which is thus achieved by a great saving and a total spending.⁸

The “transvaluations” are effected by the sloughing of conventional ideas and beliefs, and by the absorption of the energy thus liberated. Spare terms such energy “free belief”. It is this aimless energy that is seized upon at the Sabbath and directed to given ends.

The fifth clause of the Prayer introduces one of the most important aspects of Spare’s magic, that of *inbetweenness*.

In everyday life one craze or ‘belief’ follows another. By a process of not-believing, of emptying the craze or obsession of its content, we can surprise the tendency of belief to appear as one thing rather than another, or as one thing *after* another. We can in this way break through into that ecstasy of communion with the Atmospheric T which Spare calls the *Kia*, the state of inbetweenness, or Neither-Neither.

The primordial belief is ‘Self’, ‘God’, or *Kia* (it does not matter what we call it). It is the only belief that is self-evident because it is experienced by each one of us at every moment of our existence. It is also the only belief that is truly free of belief, because *to be* is to *be-live* it – as Spare aptly expresses it. It is void of necessity to become anything else, for it is all things all the time and can only and always be itself. If we can realize this we shall not fall into the error of conceptual thought, which constantly breeds other thoughts with which we temporarily identify ourselves: the Buddhist cycle of birth, death and rebirth.

In a few words, Spare states the crux of the doctrine: “By hindering belief and semen from conception, they become simple and cosmic.” Only when desire has become cosmic can the total ecstasy, which characterizes *Kia*, dawn in the individual consciousness, because it is then no longer limited or

⁸ From a manuscript, *Formula of the Witches’ Sabbath as first told me by a Witch*, by A.O.S. Subsequently published in *Zos Speaks!*, p.219.

personalized consciousness, but cosmic in scope and free to enjoy itself eternally.

In other words, one must enlarge belief or desire until it embraces all things; Spare urges us to will “insatiety of desire, brave self-indulgence and primaeval sexualism”,⁹ for belief freed from conception merges desire with the Infinite, creates a unity of Self-Knowing (which is also supreme Self-Love), and transcends the two poles of objectivity and subjectivity, discovering *in between* the two, the Real Self, *Kia*, the Atmospheric ‘I’.

After the Oath which constitutes the fifth stage of the evocation, the refrain changes from “We evoke Thee!” to a demand to the hidden Watcher to “Give us the flesh!” The petition is for the material medium whereby the desire will actually substantiate itself.

From certain historical accounts of Witchcraft, we learn that the roasted flesh of children and animals was sometimes sacrificed to the infernal powers as a sacrifice potent to achieve realization of the desires of the celebrants at the Sabbath. The literal performance of this sacrifice was a degeneration of the original magical act of transubstantiation effected by the sorcerer when he ‘sacrificed’ the child of his loins, i.e. when he consumed or burnt up his sigillized wish in the fire of forgetfulness.

The next stage of the rite evokes the “*quadriga sexualis*” (the four horsemen or powers of sex) which adumbrates the various mystical attitudes (forms of congress, postures) employed at the Sabbath. Although these are numerous, there are four main kinds. Firstly, the gesture of constant congress; secondly, the gesture of abstract creating (a masturbatory gesture) involving the Hand, the Eye, and the Atmosphere; thirdly, the gesture of simulation or astral reflection, symbolized by the Formula of the Divine Ape; and, fourthly, the gesture typical of the Witch Cult which involves the sodomitical use of the female organism.

⁹ *The Focus of Life*, by Austin O. Spare. The Morland Press, London, 1921.

Comparisons with Crowley's Cult of Sexual Magick will spring to mind, but Spare elaborates these four great gestures as follows:

In the first instance he interprets "constant congress" as the perpetual interplay of the Will (symbolized by the Hand) and the Imagination (symbolized by the Eye), for it is Will and Imagination that cause things to appear. The Tibetan Yab-Yum is the Oriental mode of representing this constant interplay of the active and passive potencies. The gesture of constant congress, therefore, resumes the prime function of the Sabbatic Rite, which is "ex-creation", or evolving from our "innerness" through living contact with "all otherness" – typified by the world without.

The second gesture – that of abstract creating – is performed by a special kind of mantric vibration, and the Mouth is the symbol of the magical implement which performs it. Reverberant evocation, prayer, adoration through song, incantation or mantra, conveys the energy of desire by tonal nuance to the necessary stratum of the subconsciousness. The technique of making the utterance effective, of resounding the depths of cosmic memory and making the "sacred alignments", is a major arcanum of the *Zos Kia Cultus*. "What sounds the depths and conjoins Will and Belief? Some inarticulate hieroglyph or sigil wrought from nascent Desire and rhythmed by unbounded Ego."¹⁰

The second gesture therefore resumes the formulation of the Great Wish on the astral plane, prior to its 'excreation', projection, and subsequent embodiment.

The third gesture of the "*quadrige sexualis*", the concept of simulation, reveals the means of reifying the Great Wish. The archetype of all such simulatory techniques is the state of total vacuity which Spare named the Death Posture. By feint, the

¹⁰ From *The Logomachy of Zos*. See *Zos Speaks!*, p.193

means of reification is concentrated through a simulation of death or annihilation. This posture is explained in the next chapter.

The fourth and final gesture, that of re-organization, rearrangement, or 'abortive congress', implies a magical formula deriving from the ancient Draconian Cults of Egypt. Either Moon Magic is implied, or the Formula of Gomorrah, both of which appear in the Crowley Cult as aspects of the IX° and XI° O.T.O. respectively. The re-organization of magical power within the human organism involves a consolidation of the reified wish until it exhausts itself through 'non-necessity'. Hence the gesture of the "*quadriga sexualis*" impregnates the glamour already projected on to the astral plane, endowing it with the energy of the sorcerer himself so that it becomes a living entity, capable of reverberant copulations through 'increative' congress.

Spare explains the Sabbath as "an inverse-reversion for self-seduction, an undoing for a divertive conation. Sex is used as the technique and medium of a magical act. There is not only erotic satisfaction; the sensualist is made detached and controlled, until final sublimation. His whole training is submissive and obedient [to the Witch] until, by cold amoral passion, he can transmute, control and divert him- or herself where desired."¹¹

Following upon the appeal to the "*quadriga sexualis*" are the words "Give us unvarying desire!" Desire, without variation of any kind, undifferentiated and undifferentiating, leads to the consummation of an unvarying bliss which is free from all concept, and therefore habitually infinite. "Ecstasy is our out-span, touching reality: a potent generative instant; its surplus may be used abstractly [i.e. by mantric vibration; see the Second Gesture] to incarnate another wish," and so on, endlessly. This is what is meant by "reverberant evocation".

The seventh stage of the rite concerns "the conquest of fatigue" which is essential to effective Sabbatic functioning; it is

¹¹ From *The Zoetic Grimoire of Zos*. See *Zos Speaks!*, p.219

(or should be) sustained somatic, cerebral and psycho-magical energy insuring intense ecstasy when the Great Exhaustion makes possible the voidness necessary to the projection of the sigil; the voidness that is the chalice containing the Great Wish. This recalls Crowley's innumerable sex-magical operations for "Sex-Force and Attraction".¹²

The penultimate petition, "Give us eternal resurgence", is a plea for the constant return of the primaevally remembered rapture, until a continuum of bliss is established wherein the *Kia* is seen, felt, and known to be the background of all possibility, the source of creation and the aim of all pleasure. It is the doctrine of atavistic resurgence.

The Sabbatic prayer concludes with an invocation of "the most sacred Word-graph of Heaven". The Word-graph of Heaven is a glyph of the Goddess, and it conceals the true purpose of the Sabbath. It is a secret glyph of Zos Kia Cultus; it invokes the Goddess, whereas the preceding stages of the rite evoked Her. Invocation is a call to the Spirit to appear subjectively; evocation is a calling forth of the Spirit to objective appearance. The hidden *Rehctaw* is evoked to visible manifestation "by the power of meanings arising from these forms I make".

According to Spare, the witch presiding at the Sabbatic rite is

. . . old, grotesque, worldly and libidiously learned; and is as sexually attractive as a corpse; yet she becomes the entire vehicle of consummation. This is necessary to transmute the personal aesthetic culture, which is thereby destroyed. Perversion is used only to overcome moral prejudices or conformity; the mind and desire must become amoral, focussed, and made entirely acceptive so that the life-force is free of inhibitions prior to the control. Thus, the Sabbath becomes a deliberate sex-orgy for the purpose of materialization: the Great Reality of 'as if' (wishful

¹² See *The Magical Record of the Beast 666*, edited by John Symonds and Kenneth Grant.

thinking). Sex is fully exploited: he who injures none, himself does not injure.¹³

Spare believed that the personal aesthetic culture (that is, the individual's idea of what constitutes beauty and ugliness), when exalted as the criterion of value *in itself*, has destroyed more affective affinity than any other 'belief'. "But he who transmutes the traditionally ugly into another aesthetic value has new pleasures beyond fear."

In *Liber Aleph*, Crowley enunciated a similar thesis. The magical ecstasy liberated by union with grotesque or hideous images usually associated with aversion, repulsion, or horror, is super-abundant compared with that released by the union of (usually accepted) opposites. One is reminded of Salvador Dali's observation that the wished-for treasure islands may lie precisely in those images of horror and dread that are naturally repellent to the conscious mind. Such a transformation of values, *à rebours*, improves health and leads to self-control, tolerance, understanding and compassion. Not only an adjunct to the rite, it accelerates the fulfilment of the Great Desire.

Nothing is attained merely by 'wanting'; epistemology, even eschatology will not help, nor Gods; but – spake Zos – the 'as if' simulations have been prolific as objective realities. Sublimation of all 'reason' to the 'blind' life-force is the whole of wisdom.¹⁴

Spare's drawings were always inspired by the New Aesthetic, the New Sexuality. They amount almost to masturbation in line; the line coils and curls upon itself and mounts the steep incline of ecstasy as the amazing sigils are woven into a complex web of dream. To follow closely the line of some of his Sabbatic drawings is to leave earth and dive obliquely between those spaces that Lovecraft celebrated in his nightmare tales. Such drawings are themselves the gateway to the Sabbath; one is drawn into a vortex and whirled down the funnel of consciousness which explodes

¹³ See *Zos Speaks!*, p.219.

¹⁴ From *The Grimoire of Zos*.

into unknown worlds. Spare would not reveal the magical graphs that unsealed the cells of these eldritch dimensions.

Of the Sabbath itself he said that it was always secret, communal and periodic; a concentrated consummation for unlimited wish-fulfilment:

The hyper-eroticism induced by this grand-scale hysteria or saturnalia has an essentially sado-masochistic basis. Previous to the ceremony each celebrant has his or her allotted part, although it usually ends promiscuously and chaotically. The initiates are trained singly in their parts and in the responses expected of them. They play a passive rôle, for the promise of untold ecstasy. *The Witches take the active part throughout*: thus the symbolic levitation by besom-handle.

There is a meeting-place and an elaborate ritual which is an extensive hypnotic to over-ride all inhibitions. Thus, smell, hearing and vision are seduced by incense and mantra (incantation and the ritual ceremony), while taste and touch are enhanced by the stimuli of wine and oral acts. After complete sexual satiation by oral, anal, or urethral means, there appears an exteriorized hallucination of the predetermined wish which is magical in its reality. No one can say precisely whether certain things happen or not, although each individual may have very different and equally vivid experiences. Some form of levitation seems common to all. My own experience of many Sabbaths is that there is consummate exteriorisation and that all subsequent memories are of reality.

All excessively sadistic acts are mainly symbolized by genuine Witches, but what simulation there is is common to most erotic rites. The whole ceremony is based mainly on inverted orthodox religious services.¹⁵

In another writing (as yet unpublished), Spare declared that "Sorcery is a deliberate act of causing metamorphoses by the

¹⁵ See *Zos Speaks!*, pp. 219-220.

employment of elementals. It forges a link with the powers of middle nature,¹⁶ or the ether, the astrals of great trees and of animals of every kind. Will is our medium, Belief is the vehicle, and Desire is the force combining with the elemental. Cryptograms are our talismans and protectors.”

The will, or nervous energy, must be suppressed in order to create tension, and released only at the psychological moment.

At that time gaze into and beyond the familiar vista (from hill-top), into *The Aeon*, the spaciousness beyond your meannesses, borrowed precepts, dogmas and beliefs; until you are in spacious unity. Indraw your breath until your body quivers and then give a mighty suspiration, releasing all your nervous energy into the focal point of your wish; and as your urgent desire merges into the ever-present procreative sea, you will feel a tremendous insurgence and self-transformation. The Devil himself shall not prevent your ‘will’ from materializing.¹⁷

¹⁶ i.e. The astral plane, between the spiritual and physical realms.

¹⁷ See *Zos Speaks!*, p.237.

The Death Posture and the New Sexuality

From the earliest times; from the mystical mummy cult of ancient Egypt to the ritual assumption of God forms as practised in the Golden Dawn, when the Chief Adept simulated the rôle of Christian Rosencreutz and lay in the pastos, ready to resurrect, the concept of death has been inextricably linked with that of sex.

The illustration entitled *The Death Posture*, which forms the frontispiece to *The Book of Pleasure*, contains, in an allegorical form, the whole doctrine of the New Sexuality.

The figure of Zos¹ is seated at a circular table strewn with strange images. His right hand is pressed to his face, sealing the mouth and hindering the flow of breath (life-force) to and from the nostrils; his eyes stare with fixed intensity at YOU – the witness. With his left hand he writes the mystic characters which embody his desires in sigil form. The identity of hand and serpent (i.e. phallus) is here made patent. About him are the innumerable images of past desires concealed in figures human and bestial, elemental and fey, some transfixed with the metal of hate, some exalted to his right hand to the place of love, some in attitudes of gaiety, contemplation and seductive surrender; another *glows* – an inscrutable mask of inward ecstasy, transcending duality in a mode of pleasure which baffles the understanding. Before Zos, above him, and to his left side, are

¹ The name Zos is not only the magical name of Austin Spare, for in *The Book of Pleasure*, he writes: “The body considered as a whole I call Zos.”

the winged skulls of the dead. The skull – emblematic of death – is prominently featured, buried in his thick tousled hair. Thus, death dominates thought; or, more precisely, all thought is dead, utterly abolished, and a compelling intensity of voidness streams from the eyes which regard one hypnotically; and, under the eyes, the hand supports the head as a pedestal supports a chalice.

The two magical implements – the Eye and the Hand – are here made subject to death; they have accomplished their unified task and found apotheosis in annihilation. No breath (life-principle, *prana*) stirs the immobile shapes around them. A state of suspended activity is implied, a suspension which simulates Death (ΘNE). Death or *thané* is the motto of Zos, whose full magical motto was *Zos vel Thanatos*. He says, in *Earth: Inferno* (1905): “Death is All.”

All the religions and magical cults of antiquity laid emphasis upon the idea of death, which was interpreted as a birth on to another plane of existence. The tomb and the womb were interchangeable terms denoting the comings and goings of the ego at various levels, for the purpose of enacting the laws of karma decreed by destiny. Death is “the coming forth of the suppressed; the becoming by *going*; the great chance: an adventure in Will that translates into body”. This is the key to the Death Posture, really an *imposture*, a simulation of death for the purpose of allowing the suppressed dream to emerge and translate into body.

But the Death Posture is more than a ritual simulation of death, just as in the supreme rite of Masonry there is (or should be) a true resurrection born of the imitated resurrection rehearsed for the purpose of externalizing the interior truth.

In the Alphabet of Sentient Symbols which Spare devised to form the basis of his Language of Desire, the sign ♀ symbolizes the Ego, the principle of duality, while ♂ symbolizes the Death Posture, the dissolution of duality in the formless state of Absolute Consciousness.

The 'preliminary sensation' of the Death Posture (see *The Book of Pleasure*) is a fine example of Spare's ability of 'visualizing sensation'. The figure is hunched upon itself in a concentration of inner awareness and bliss, and the six-rayed Star of Will blazes at its heart; the right hand clasps an invisible weapon. The hand symbolizes the Creative Will, and the Eyes, which symbolize both desire and imagination, are closed or *covered*. It is easy to interpret the picture as meaning intense power locked within the body, pending its explosive outpouring in any desired form.

It is at the junction between life and death, between the active current of Will and the passive current of Imagination – the junction of Hand and Eye – that the concept of the New Sexuality is born. A full understanding of the Death Posture leads to a full understanding of the primal, unmodified and 'new' (because ever fresh) sexuality.

Spare describes the Death Posture as "a simulation of death by the utter negation of thought, i.e. the prevention of desire from belief, and the functioning of all consciousness through the sexuality".²

"By the Death Posture the body is allowed to manifest spontaneously and is arbitrary and impervious to action. Only he who is unconscious of his actions has courage beyond good and evil, and is pure in this wisdom of sound sleep."³

In order to assume this posture successfully, it is necessary to have *re-membered* that remote layer of subconscious memory where knowledge reverts to instinct and becomes law. At this moment, which is the moment of generation of the Great Wish, inspiration flows from the source of sex, from the primordial Goddess who exists at the heart of matter. "Inspiration is always at a void moment, and most great discoveries are accidental, usually brought about by exhaustion of the mind":⁴ i.e. when

² *The Focus of Life*, 1921.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *The Book of Pleasure*, 1913.

conscious 'knowledge' has been discarded and pure instinctive awareness has taken its place.

The Death Posture is the summing-up of the four major gestures which constitute the magic spells of Zos. Will, Desire, and Belief are a threefold unity capable of stirring the subconsciousness and forcing it to yield its content. This varies according to the nature of the desire and the amount of 'free' belief which the sigil contains.

Methods of energizing belief vary, but imagination suggests the best means. In other words, be spontaneous, do not make it a matter for thought. To reify the dream or wish, Spare employs the hand and the eye. The intense nostalgia reaches backwards into remote 'awayness', and vivid wishfulness craves impact with 'all otherness' – the Self with the not-Self – so that a long-forgotten familiar spirit arises and obsesses the conscious mind; then, and then only, the ancient experience is re-lived and takes on flesh.

The embodiment of resurrected selves, evoked by the yearning to know them once more, appears actual, luminous to the eye and tactual to the hand. In this manner is the body resurrected; not as a misty dream, but palpable to all-feeling touch and perceptible to all-seeing vision. "Out of the Past cometh this *new* thing."

The resurrection of the body is always occurring, even in everyday life, but it is an involuntary resurrection, usually mistimed and therefore unwanted. By use of the autotelic theurgy of Zos it is possible to live all lives and incarnate all dreams, *now*, at once. In the Zoetic Grimoire of Zos, Spare makes it plain that "identity is an obsession, a composite of personalities, all counterfeiting each other; a faveolated ego, a resurging catacomb where the phantomesque demiurgoses seek *in us* their reality".

Through the Death Posture our *thisness* is realized as identical with the *thatness* of so-called others; a quality that is

really no-quality, partaking as it does of neither this nor that. And with the apprehension of *Kia* (Self) as Neither-Neither, is born the new aesthetic or sexual sense, which is our *thisness* in a new dimension, and the source of all *thatness* that we constantly project as female bodies.

This introduces a weird concept of sexuality which Spare used as the basis of his theurgy. All women are seen as forms of our desire; they are *desire sigillised*; and because of the conditioned quality of our belief, they are conditioned and subject to change, appearing to us as ‘all otherness’ desiring union with our *thisness*. “Fortunate is he who absorbs his female bodies – ever projecting – for he acquires the extent of his body.”⁵

Spare does not limit the meaning of the word ‘body’ to the fleshly body; if this were the case there would be no sense in his declaring “Death is All”, and in glorifying the simulation of a condition which writes *finis* to the physical organism. The phrase “the extent of his body” involves a state of sentience of which the physical organism is but a single reification and resurrection. Spare’s ultimate doctrine implies the unification of sensation on all planes *simultaneously*, so that the ego may be fully aware of its myriad entities and identities in a ‘now’ and a ‘here’ that is everlasting. This is what is meant by acquiring “the extent of his body”.

In the Grimoire he says: “We are never fully aware of things except by the influx of sexual will awakening us”, and the Death Posture concentrates all the senses and turns them back into the primal sense – the sexual – which infuses the body with total awareness on all planes at once. Without knowledge of how to assume the Death Posture “entity exists in many units simultaneously, without consciousness of Ego *as one flesh*. What greater misery than this?”⁶

In the same book, Spare asks: “For what reason is this loss of

⁵ *The Focus of Life*.

⁶ *Ibid.*

memory by these bewildering refractions of my original image – that I once made?” The Death Posture contains the answer for, by uniting vital belief (i.e. organic desire) and dynamic will, the “extent of his body” is acquired.

Ecstasy, perfect Self-Love, attains its apotheosis in the Death Posture, for “when ecstasy is transcended by ecstasy, the ‘I’ becomes atmospheric and there is no place for sensuous objects to conceive *differently* and react”.⁷

And so we arrive full circle at the hindrance to conception which is the basis of *Zos Kia Cultus*, and which is implied by the sigillization of desire in a figure bearing no pictorial resemblance to the nature of the desire.

In order to escape from the cycle of rebirth we must break free from the transmigratory cycle of belief, for we cannot believe in any one thing for any length of time. Therefore, by assiduously emptying the belief of its charge and by directing the newly-released energy towards a non-necessitousness and non-reactionary Self-Love, the individual negates *karma*⁸ and attains to the realm of *Kia* (the Atmospheric ‘I’). True Self control is achieved “by leaving things to work out their own salvation. Directly we interfere we become identified and subject to their desire.”⁹

This doctrine resembles, though it is not identical with, the philosophy of *Advaita Vedanta* or non-duality. Spare sums up with the words: “So long as the notion remains that there is *compulsory bondage* in the world, or even in dreams, there is such bondage. Remove the conception of Freedom and Bondage in any world or state, by meditation on Freedom in Freedom by the Neither-Neither.”¹⁰ And he adds: “There is no crucifixion.”

⁷ *The Book of Pleasure*, 1913

⁸ Cause and effect.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.* The Neither-Neither is the *Neti-Neti* (Not-this Not-that) of the Vedantins.

In order therefore to appreciate the idea of the New Sexuality it is necessary that the mind be merged with the *Kia*, and that there exist no stresses (i.e. thoughts) in consciousness, for thoughts modify consciousness and create the absurd illusion of an individual owner of consciousness.

The concept of the Universal Woman,¹¹ She with whom Zos “strayed into the path direct,” is both the inceptor and preceptor of the New Sexuality which transcends duality. She is the glyph of perfect polarity which cancels out to Nought. In Crowley’s Cult she is Nuit, of whom 0=2 is the mystical formula.¹²

Absolute Consciousness (*Kia*, the Self), like infinite Space (Nuit), is without a boundary; it is the plenum-void, formless and unlocatable; to all intents and purposes – nothing at all, *except that it is the sole Reality!*

In the deepest recesses of the subconscious this reality resembles lightning, or a flashing shaft of intense brilliance. It is the hieroglyph of potential desire, ever ready to leap into form and become “the actualization of our late God”, i.e. the embodiment of our latest belief.

This primal desire, this ‘new’ or ageless sexuality, is the one sense of all the senses that is real. It is the one constant factor in our changefulness. The more this sense can be extended to embrace everything, the more the Self can realize itself, understand itself, know itself, and finally *be itself* wholly, perpetually and non-necessitously. “The new law shall be the arcana of the mystic unbalanced ‘Does not matter – need not be’; there is no necessitation, ‘please yourself’ is its creed (the Belief ever striving for denial is kept free by retention in this state).”¹³

This is very reminiscent of Crowley’s creed of Do What Thou Wilt, but there is a difference. As the Negative Path of Taoism is

¹¹ See *Earth: Inferno*, 1905, first drawing.

¹² See Chapter 1, *supra*.

¹³ *The Book of Pleasure*.

to the Positive Path of traditional Hinduism, so is this creed of Self-Love and *Zos-Kia* to that of Thelema and Love under Will.

For Spare, woman symbolizes the desire to unite with “all otherness” *as Self*; not the individual manifestations of woman, but the primitive woman of which or of whom mortal women are refracted images.

Call this inconceivable concept sex, desire, emotion; or personify it as The Goddess, the Witch, the Primitive Woman; she is the cypher of all *inbetweenness*, the elusive ecstasy of the lightning pathway that Zos called “the precarious funambulatory way”. To adore her is not achieved by imprisoning her in an ephemeral form and limiting her to this or that, but by transcending the thisness and the thatness of all things and experiencing her in the unity of Self-Love.

Spare did not embody her arbitrarily as Astarte, Isis, Cybele, or Nuit (though he often drew her in these god forms), for to limit her is to turn aside from the path and idealize the idol which is false because partial, unreal because non-eternal. “The possessive personalize, idolize love, and so the morbid awakening . . .”¹⁴

The use of such idols is permissible, even desirable, for the purpose of storing free belief during an inactive or non-creative period, when energy is not required. But the main objection to the continued use of idols is that “the familiar induces fatigue; fatigue induces indifference; let nothing be seen in such a manner; let seeing be as vision – every sight a revelation. Fatigue disappears when this is the constant attitude,”¹⁴ i.e. when the image is always new, and the sexuality, therefore, always stimulated afresh.

By not permitting free belief to be locked in a particular god form, the impact of sight as revelation is easily inculcated and sterility abolished. It is one of Spare’s fundamental maxims that “the familiar is always sterile”,¹⁴ one cannot breed from familiar

¹⁴ *The Grimoire of Zos.*

images. Familiarity leads to devitalization, laziness, and conventional attitudes – the easy way out of difficulties. “Let me overcome this cursed fatigue and I will become a God.”¹⁵

The mind must be trained to see ever freshly, and Spare’s formula for achieving this is to “provoke consciousness in touch, ecstasy in vision . . . Let thy highest virtue be Insatiety of desire, brave self-indulgence and primaeval sexualism.”

The key to primaeval sexualism, or the New Sexuality, is given in *The Focus of Life* where Zos exclaims: “Dispense with all means to an end.” It is the path of Immediacy as against the procrastination of reality in an un-energized ‘as if’ simulation: “Do it now, not eventually . . . for desire except by the act shall in nowise obtain.”¹⁶

And, again: “Realization is not by the mere utterance of the words ‘I am I’, nor by self-abuse, but by the living act.” Self-abuse is here used as synonymous with simulation; do not pretend to be ‘I’: be the Self absolutely, wholly and in reality, *now*.

This is the theurgy of making the Word flesh. In *The Book of Pleasure*, he asks: “Why assume ceremonial robes and masks, and simulate attitudes of the Gods ?¹⁷ Most emphatically, there is no need for repetition or feeble imitation. You are alive!” This is the reason for his rebuking magicians and those who merely “rehearse” reality, while mocking the very vitality they embody, and desire, by a simulation which in itself denies it!

Spare claims that magic merely ruins the reality by positing a moment, even, when the Self is not real and vital, when it is not all things; or, rather, when the power of becoming all things is not inherent in it. People “praise ceremonial magic and are supposed to suffer much Ecstasy! Our asylums are crowded, the

¹⁵ *The Grimoire of Zos*.

¹⁶ *Anathema of Zos*, 1927.

¹⁷ This is, no doubt, a direct criticism by Spare of the ceremonial techniques and the assumption of god forms practised in the Golden Dawn, of which he was a member in 1910. His motto was *Yihoveaum*.

stage is over-run! Is it by symbolizing we become the symbolized? Were I to crown myself King, should I be King? Rather should I be an object of disgust or pity.”¹⁸

These teachings, evolved by Spare before the First World War, are very close to the doctrines of the Sudden School of Cha'an Buddhism, the texts of which have only recently been made generally available.

To dispense with all means to an end is simply said, but not so simply done. A full development of the aesthetic sense is required, for without it it is not even possible to accept the doctrine of the New Sexuality, either intellectually or symbolically. It may be done by saturating the body-mind complex in the subtle effluvia of *Zos Kia Cultus*, by following the thread of Spare's work into the deep and dimly-illuminated cells of the subconsciousness; by acquiring an ultra-sensitive awareness to events and things, as being *not different* from the Self. Spare understands all Nature (the objective universe) as the sum of our past, symbolized, crystallized apparently outside ourselves. The *potential*, alone, at the lightning-swift instant of its transudation, is to be seized and be-lived (i.e. believed) in an ecstatic immediacy, for “when ecstasy is transcended by ecstasy, the ‘I’ becomes atmospheric and there is no place for sensuous objects to conceive differently . . .”

But one cannot locate the Supreme Belief in Nature, because as soon as the Word has been uttered, the reality is of the past, is no longer reality *now*, can but live in resurrection when re-utterance makes it flesh; it is neither what is uttered nor he who utters; nor is it the utterance, but a vague and subtle inbetweenness concept that renders reality at the split-second of its actual transudation. “There is no spoken truth that is not past – more wisely forgotten.”¹⁹

In the Grimoire, he says: “The fractional second is the path I

¹⁸ *The Book of Pleasure*.

¹⁹ *Anathema of Zos*, 1927.

would open . . .” This path and the path of lightning-swift assimilation are synonymous terms describing an indescribable state which is conceptless – the Neither-Neither, Self-Love, Kia, or the New Sexuality.

Spare’s art is not widely known, nor has it received the appreciation it deserves, and his intensely personal system of sorcery has not yet woven its way into the structure of present-day occultism. There are signs, however, that it will not be long before the ‘as if’ simulations and the ‘as now’ ecstasies give a powerful impetus to the magical current of the New Aeon, for if anyone sensed and interpreted this current right at its inception it was certainly Austin Osman Spare.